NEW
NICK CARTER
WEEKLY

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A COMPACT WITH DAZAAR

OR THE DEVIL WORSHIPER'S DEN

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER."

The horrible liquid that was sprayed upon them by Nick Carter, blinding and choking them, had made them think that they were attacked by a force greater than their own numbers.

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A COMPACT WITH DAZAAR:

OR,

The Devil Worshipers' Den.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE DEVIL-WORSHIPERS' TRAP.

Nick Carter came to an abrupt halt at the corner of the avenue, and frowned.

"It is the sign of the Devil Worshipers, Chick," he said to his companion, and he indicated by a gesture a group of chalk marks that had been inscribed on the pavement.

"So I see," replied Chick. "But it seems to be rather ambiguous, doesn't it?"

"Yes; it points two ways at once."

"Isn't it a rule with the Devil Worshipers in making these signs to place the arrow so that it points in the direction opposite the desired point?"

"Always. I have never known them to do otherwise."

"But here are two arrows, and they point in opposite directions."

"So I see."

"What do you make of that?"

"Simply," replied Nick, "that one of them will lead to nothing."

"While the other will ultimately lead to the place of meeting."

"Sure."

"Well, Nick, we have searched this entire city for a whole week for a clew to the hiding place of Dazaar; it would seem as if we have fallen upon one at last."

The detective shook his head.

"You are jumping at conclusions, Chick," he said.

"How so?"

"Because Dazaar would not consent to the use of

these signals, knowing that I am on the track and that I am perfectly familiar with these signs."

"Unless——" began Chick, and stopped.

"Unless what, Chick?"

"Unless they were made use of for the specific purpose of attracting your attention."

"By Jove, Chick, you've hit it!"

"You think, then, that these signs are intended for a lure?"

"Undoubtedly."

"But if that is the case why are they made so obscure?"

"Why, don't you see? That is part of the plan. Dazaar knows mighty well that I would scent a trap the instant my eyes lighted upon signs like these; and so——"

"I see. And so the signs are made as if it were intended that you should not read them, and thus are left for you to study out."

"That's the idea."

"The long and short of it is that they were placed there with the sole intention that you would see them and trace them out."

"That's about the size of it."

"Which you will not do."

"Which I will do, you mean."

"And walk into the trap that is prepared for you?"

"And walk—or at least appear to walk—into the trap they have set for me."

"You are determined to keep up this search for Dazaar to the end, are you?"

"Chick, I promised myself, in the form of a solemn oath, a week ago, that I would not think of another thing or do another thing until I had hunted Dazaar, man, woman or fiend, whichever the real Dazaar may be, off the face of the earth. I mean to keep that oath; and what is more, I do not mean to permit a single opportunity, however small it may be, to escape me. I will find that woman, or that devil, or that living horror, whatever, whoever, or whichever it is, and the next time we are face to face——"

"Well?"

"Chick, Dazaar, or Nick Carter—one of them—has got to get off the earth."

"Then I see Dazaar's finish," said Chick, with a smile; but Nick's attention was again fixed upon the chalk marks on the pavement, and he appeared not to have heard the facetious remark.

"I wish my little Jap were here," remarked Nick musingly. "He would be a whole lot of help to me just now, Chick. I think with you, and Patsy, and Ten-Ichi* on the side, we could surround that outfit of Dazaar's, so to speak, and 'do' it to a finish."

For a moment Chick did not reply, while he seemed to be lost in deep thought, as if an unusual problem had suddenly occurred to him; but at the end of that time he thrust one hand into his pocket and drew forth a telegram which he gave to Nick.

"I received that this morning," he said. "It was a harmless request of his, and I resolved to humor him; but now that you have mentioned his name, I think you ought to be told."

"What do you mean? What is it?" asked Nick.

"A telegram from Ten-Ichi, sent from Buffalo, while he was passing through. He will be here to-night."

"Ten-Ichi? Here to-night? Why was I not told?" demanded Nick, with a frown.

"The lad wished to surprise you. Listen, Nick. I received a letter from him, mailed only one steamer before he started for this country, from Japan. He told me in that letter that he would soon be here, but asked me as a special favor to say nothing to you about it as he wished to surprise you. This morning I received the telegram. It seemed a harmless request, and I——"

"Oh, that's all right, Chick! It would have been a surprise, in face, it is quite as great a surprise as it is, and a most welcome one, too. He comes just in time, for I want him."

"We will doubtless find him at the house when we return for dinner."

*Read 372 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY.

"Good! Now let's attend to these Devil Worshipers' signs."

"What shall you do about them?"

"You follow the arrow which points westward; I'll take the other one. One of them will probably lead to nothing. In either case we will both return here."

They were at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Thirty-fifth street—the very point at which, long ago, the signal of the Devil Worshipers had also appeared.

As Nick ceased speaking, he and Chick started away in different directions, walking rapidly, and as they did so, a tall and handsome, although somewhat swarthy-faced man descended the steps of the clubhouse which is on that corner, and crossed the pavement to a carriage which at that moment drew up against the curb.

The window of the carriage was lowered as he approached, and the face of a beautiful woman appeared at the aperture. At the same moment, the man raised his hat and bowed with remarkable grace.

And also at the same moment another thing occurred which nobody seemed to notice at all, but which is, nevertheless, important to the readers.

Two boys who had been tossing a ball to and fro between them, suddenly ceased to play.

The reason was that one of the boys had chanced to glance toward the steps of the clubhouse and had seen the swarthy gentleman descend the steps—and he also saw the carriage draw up at the curb, and the beautiful face appear at the window.

The boy who observed these things, suddenly lost his hold on the ball, and in such a manner that it rolled directly under the carriage, and almost to the feet of the swarthy man, who was now conversing with the lady inside it.

Instantly the boy was on his knees and had crawled underneath the carriage in pursuit of the ball, but somehow he seemed to be a long time in securing possession of it.

"If you, my reader, had been under that carriage with the boy, you could have heard every word which passed between the gentleman and the lady—but you would not have understood what they were saying, nevertheless, for they conversed in a strangely foreign tongue, the like of which is rarely heard in the city of New York.

Even Nick Carter himself would not have understood, for, although he could speak, and read, write, and understand perfectly seventeen languages, this particular tongue was one which he had never acquired —and the reader may guess what it was, for it was Thibetan.

Whether the boy who listened under the carriage understood the man and woman or not, he seemed strangely interested, and it could not have been the mere sound of the language he heard, either, for it was fiercely guttural.

Suddenly, however, he seemed to have heard all that he desired, for he grasped the ball, which had hitherto eluded his fingers, and escaped from his precarious position just in time to avoid the heels of the horses which backed toward him before they started forward.

Scrambling out, he rejoined his friend, and once more the ball was sky-rocketed between them.

The carriage drove away and disappeared around the corner, the swarthy man re-entered the clubhouse, and the boys were still tossing the ball when Nick Carter and his chief assistant, Chick, returned upon the scene from opposite directions.

Neither of the detectives noticed the boys at all, and the boys did not appear to notice the detectives; but when, after a short lapse of time, Nick and Chick started away together, and the swarthy individual, accompanied by another man of his own complexion and general appearance, appeared on the steps of the clubhouse, and the second swarthy man started away in the direction taken by the detectives, the boys ceased their play and walked along, arm in arm, in that direction also.

In the meantime, Nick Carter had said to Chick:

"You found nothing in that direction, did you?"

"No."

"Well, I did. Come with me."

"What do you intend to do?"

"I intend to find out where the Devil Worshipers are to meet and when they are to meet; after that, we will return home and talk it over, but all the same, I

haven't a doubt that my real intentions are to attend that meeting wherever it may happen to be, and to be present at their hideous ceremonies, even if there are ten thousand Dazaars present, and each one of them is ten thousand times more to be feared than the Dazaar we know about."

"You will find that it is a trap, Nick—a trap they have set for you."

"Then, by thunder, I'll walk into their trap—and bust it!"

CHAPTER II.

A MENACE FROM EVERY SIDE.

But the signs of the Devil Worshipers did not lead the two detectives far, for presently they discovered that the signs had ceased, and that, like the other end, which Chick had followed in the beginning, they led to nothing.

"Here ends the first lesson," said Nick, coming to a pause at last. "This, I take it, is the bait."

While he spoke, he half turned so that he partly faced in the direction from whence he had come, and instantly there flashed across his face a look which Chick perfectly understood, for it meant as plainly as if Nick had said the words, that they were followed, and that the detective was aware of the fact.

However, Chick made no sign; instead, he directed his reply to the remark that Nick had made.

"What do you mean by the bait?" he asked.

"Simply that they have led us this far in order to see if we will bite at all, and now that we have bitten, so to speak, and they are aware of it—for we are watched—they will presently give us more arrows to follow, and so, little by little, we will be permitted to know where this meeting is to be."

"And in the meantime?"

"Well, in the meantime, I would like to know where they happen to be hanging out at present. Did you see that figure one under the last arrow?"

"Yes."

"I suppose that means, if it means anything at all, that if we will come here one day later, we will find more arrows. I say, Chick."

"Well?"

"I don't think we'll have to bother about those arrows much."

"Why not?"

"Because it is so much easier to follow a man, isn't it?"

"Decidedly."

"Well, they have put one on our trail. He is just back there a few steps. I wonder if he thinks that we are novices?"

"You can depend upon it that he knows we are not," replied Chick.

"By Jove, I have it!" said Nick, suddenly.

"What?"

"The idea."

"What is the idea?"

"Simply this: Dazaar knows mighty well that no such chump as that fellow could trail me very far without my being onto the fact, and, therefore, he has been put on the trail simply because they intend me to tumble to him. See?"

"Sure."

"Chick, this isn't one trap they have set for you and me; there are several of them."

"I haven't a doubt of it."

"More than likely, though, they all lead to the same dead-fall. Look out, there!"

"What's the matter?"

Nick Carter had no time to reply to Chick's sudden question, for he had leaped out of the way of two boys who were rushing and pushing each other down the street, and when Nick uttered the warning, they were in the very act of a collision with both of the detectives.

Nick succeeded in dodging them, but Chick was not so fortunate.

Both boys struck him squarely amidships, and he rolled over upon the pavement between them in a manner that was most undignified.

Chickering Carter's temper was not always proof against occasions of that kind, and he came near to

losing it then. As it was, he seized the boy who was nearest him, and whose face he had not seen at all, and was on the point of boxing his ears, when he was surprised to hear the boy utter his own name in a rapid undertone.

"D...n't hit me, Chick," he said. "I'm Ten-Ichi. Just arrived. The other lad is with me. I knocked t... down purposely. Give me a kick and send me the... it my business. I'll keep tabs on the chap who is hi... owing you and the chief. Just go home and wait f... me there. I've got a lot to tell the chief about Dazaar. That is what I've come back here, all the way from Japan, to do. At least, that is one of the reasons."

In the meantime, Nick Carter had stepped forward, for his quick eyes perceived that the boy was talking to Chick, and he saw in the circumstance something that was not altogether accidental.

The instant his eyes rested upon Ten-Ichi, notwithstanding the disguise of the ingenious Jap, he recognized him; but not by a word or a sign did he evidence the fact that he knew the lad.

"Out of this!" he cried, seizing Ten-Ichi by the collar and dragging him to his feet.

Then, with a twist of his arm he sent the son of the Mikado whirling across the street.

A hundred feet back along the street, the swarthy man had been an interested spectator of this scene, and he regarded it with a smile which was as enigmatical as his whole bearing.

He was still smiling when Nick and Chick passed him as they retraced their steps; and when the detectives had traversed some distance so that they knew they were out of hearing, Nick remarked:

"What did you make of that smile, Chick?"

"Rather fetching, wasn't it?" replied the assistant.

"Rather complacent and self-satisfied, I thought," said the detective. "If it meant anything at all, it meant that he did not regard that rough-and-tumble scene as altogether an accident."

"Those Oriental smiles are difficult to fathom, Nick."

"Rather. What did Ten-Ichi have to tell you?"

Chick repeated, word for word, all that Ten-Ichi had said to him while they were struggling on the pavement together.

"Do you know, Chick," said Nick, at the conclusion, "I have always had an idea that Ten-Ichi would reappear in just this way. The rascal! He wanted to surprise me, did he? Well, if the fact will afford him any satisfaction, you may tell him, when you get the opportunity, that he succeeded. When did that telegram come from Buffalo?"

"This morning."

"Then you can depend upon it that Ten-Ichi left it there to be forwarded two or three days after he had passed through the place. He has been in New York more than an hour or two. Stop and tie your shoe, Chick, and see if that swarthy chap is following us. I won't turn around."

"Yes; he is on the trail."

"All right. We'll take him home with us and see how long he'll stay there. We'll let Ten-Ichi tell us what becomes of him; eh?"

"That is not only the easier, but it is the better way, I think."

"Sure."

They strode on in silence together for some distance after that, and were in the act of turning a corner into Madison Avenue when Nick Carter again broke the silence.

"Look straight ahead of you, Chick, and tell me what you see," he said.

"Another one of those swarthy fellows. What are they? Hindoos, Thibetans, or what?"

"Thibetans, I reckon. Now look across the avenue, directly opposite him. What do you see there?"

"Another one of them, by Jove!"

"Exactly. Now cast your eyes over my shoulders to a point directly opposite me."

"Still another."

"Correct. Now, I have noticed that they have rather a peculiar gait, as if they had passed most of their lives on horseback and the rest of it climbing mountains. Look way ahead of the fellow in front of us and tell me what you see."

Chick did as he was told to do, and studied carefully the view ahead of him.

"I see four more of them," he said, presently. "Two on this side of the avenue, and two more on the opposite side. They are almost opposite each other."

"Correct again. Now, let's count up. Counting the one who is following us, that makes eight of them in plain sight at this moment, if we should look around behind us, doesn't it, old man?"

"It does, for sure. And if the number in front is any criterion of the number behind, there should be fourteen of them, all told; eh?"

"Quite a respectable showing; eh, Chick?"

"What the devil does it mean?"

"Search me! Perhaps they intend to frighten us by a mere exhibition of numbers."

"Maybe; but I doubt that."

"So do I, as a matter of fact. Anyhow, they are in evidence."

"Can you guess what it all means, Nick?"

"Nay, nay; I'm no Dazaar to read the stars—or these Thibetans, either. But if it means anything at all, it means that they propose to carry the war into Africa."

"How so?"

"Well, this way: I wouldn't wonder if every Devil Worshiper within reach of post or telegraph has been summoned here—perhaps by our gentle enemy, Dazaar. I should say, from the appearance of things, that the city is filled with Devil Worshipers; and if we reason—as we must do—that there are just as many or more behind us, at the right of us and at the left of us as there are in front of us, why we are surrounded by quite a number of them. Of course, I am speaking metaphorically. They are not exactly to the right of us and the left of us and before and behind us, like the cannon in the charge of the Six Hundred, but it amounts to that. I shouldn't wonder, Chick, if Dazaar has taken an oath something like my own."

"It looks like it."

"It does for a fact. She doesn't propose to let me have oath-making all to myself, and so she has said that she will just drop other things until she gets Mr. Nicholas Carter out of the way for good and all. I hope she has."

"Why?"

"Well, it will be more exciting. Do you know what I am thinking, Chick?"

"No. Tell me."

"I am thinking that this city is full of Devil Worshipers—perhaps a thousand or more of them, and everyone a shrewd, wily, cruel, crafty, relentless foe; and everyone of them sworn to the death to thust me and all my friends and belongings off the eath forever."

CHAPTER III.

THE SILENT AND TERRIBLE TOUCH OF DAZAAR.

The two men strode on in silence after that, for th conclusion arrived at by the detective had given them both food for thought.

Both could understand that there was reason for it, moreover.

An entire week had passed since Nick Carter had rescued Cora Tempest from the clutches of Irma Plavatski,* and during that time both he and Chick, assisted by Patsy, had scoured the city from the Harlem River to the Battery, but never once had any of them discovered a sign of Dazaar or her followers.

She seemed to have disappeared utterly; and Nick Carter, pressed as he was by the demands upon him, would long ago have decided in his own mind that she had fled from the city, and so had gone out of his life forever, and thus would have abandoned the search, had it not been for the promise he had made to himself that he would devote himself utterly and entirely to the task of hunting Irma Plavatski, otherwise Dazaar, down, and that he would not abandon the pursuit of her until he knew of his own knowledge that she was beyond the power of committing further wrong or doing further harm.

During that week, as has already been said, there was never once a sign of the presence of Dazaar or

*See NICK CARTER WEEKLY, No. 394.

any of her followers; and now, as if they had dropped out of the sky, the city seemed suddenly to be filled with them.

Until the moment Nick discovered the chalked figures on the pavement at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Thirty-fifth Street, nothing had been seen or heard of Dazaar, or of a Thibetan; within an hour after that discovery was made, lo! there were Thibetans to the right of them, to the left of them, before and behind them; and by the same token there were doubtless many others around them who remained unseen through it all.

And Nick Carter, and Chick as well, saw menace in everyone of them.

It was plain to the detective that they were not all in the city at once, for nothing.

It was plain to him that Dazaar, determined now to have revenge upon Nick Carter, and either to conquer him or kill him, had summoned all the followers who could be reached to her aid, and that henceforth, not only Nick Carter himself, but Chick, and Patsy, Cora Tempest and, in fact, every friend and associate of the great detective, would live in daily and hourly peril of their lives and their happiness.

That was the problem which confronted the detective as he strode along beside Chick.

If the menace were against himself alone, he would have been less concerned about it; but he knew only too well that it was against every person who called him friend.

For he knew that such was the established method by which Dazaar proceeded.

Dazaar delighted to strike those subtle blows which produce mental agony without inflicting physical pain.

To kill a man is of itself a small thing. But to kill his friends one by one, and to make him feel that it is because they are his friends that they lose their lives, or their fortunes or their happiness—that is another, and a terrible thing.

And, while the detective knew that the sword was hanging in the air above him—while he knew that he and those he loved were menaced on every side, he also realized that he was utterly powerless to prevent the blow from falling—unless he could see it when it was about to fall, and stay it before it reached its mark.

He could not point out this or that man as inimical to his life, simply because that man happened to be of swarthy complexion, and a Thibetan.

A thousand of them might pass before his door every day, and show their gleaming teeth in as many enigmatical and threatening smiles; Nick could do nothing to stop all that. A man may not be thrust into prison for a smile.

"We're up against it, Chick," he said, "hard! The question is, where will they strike the first blow?"

"God knows!" replied Chick.

"Ay; and so do I! At least, I think I do," said Nick.

"Where, then?"

"Cora Tempest. Dazaar hates her almost as madly as she hates me."

"But——"

"It will be Cora first; it may be you next."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Chick.

"No, old fellow, it is not nonsense! There are none so safe from real bodily harm in this dilemma as I am. It is Dazaar's method to make me suffer through my friends—and you are one of them."

"Well, I shall not run away from her, for all that."

"You wouldn't know how to run away from anybody or anything, Chick. But I must find a method to guard Cora."

"Perhaps she will consent to let me sleep at her house for a night or two," suggested Chick.

Again they lapsed into silence, and so, turned the corner into the street where Nick Carter had his residence; and they had proceeded only a short distance along it toward the house when, at the same instant, they discovered Cora Tempest's maid approaching them rapidly, and as if she was in unusual haste.

"Where away now, Martha?" asked Nick, as they came within speaking distance.

"Ah, sir, it is you. Thank Heaven, I met you! I am going after Miss Tempest, sir."

"Indeed! Where is she?" asked Nick, surprised at the girl's manner.

"I do not know, sir; I cannot tell," replied Martha, twisting her handkerchief nervously in her hands. "I —it is all very strange, sir."

"What is strange, girl? Tell me at once."

"Miss Tempest. You see, about an hour ago there was a strange gentleman came to the house; a dark, handsome sort of a man he was, and when I had taken him into the parlor, he handed me his card, which had a name on it that I could not pronounce. I started to take it to Miss Tempest, who was in the library, and when I gave it to her, she said she had no idea who the man could be, and told me to say that she was not at home and to show him out again."

"Well?" said Nick, impatiently. "Go on."

"I turned to do her bidding, sir, and I nearly screamed outright when I saw the dark man standing in the library door. He was looking straight past me, over my shoulder, and his two eyes were glowing like coals of fire."

Nick growled out something that was unintelligable between his teeth, and Martha continued:

"He was smiling, sir, and showing his white and gleaming teeth with his upper lip drawn back the same way a dog does it when he means mischief, but all the time his air was that deferential that I didn't know what to do, and I stood there, like a fool, looking at him for almost half a minute before it occurred to me to turn to Miss Tempest again."

"Go on," commanded Nick, as she hesitated for breath.

"Well, sir, when I did turn around, Miss Cora was smiling back at him as if she had known the human serpent all her life, and as if she was as glad to see him as could be; but all the same I know now that there was something strange in her smile and in the expression of her face, although I did not realize it at the time.

"'You seem to have forgotten my name, Miss Tempest,' the man was saying, in a low tone that reminded me of the purring of a cat, 'but I hope you have not forgotten me as well. May I come in?'

"'Certainly,' she replied; but she never looked at me at all; only at him.

"Well, sir, I didn't know what to do; and there was really only one thing for me to do, which was to leave the room; so I went out; but I left the door open behind me, and I stayed in the parlor, waiting for him to go.

"Then, after a minute, I heard him, or her, I don't know which, close the door; then, after another little while, it opened again, and the man came out, and Miss Cora followed him. She passed by him in the hall, and walked straight to the front door and opened it. She had on her hat, for she had that in the library with her.

"That's all, sir. The long and short of it is that she passed by me without a word and went out of the house, followed by that snaky man, and I haven't seen her since; and I sat there and waited for her return till I got so tired and nervous that I could wait no longer, so I started out to find her myself."

"How long ago do you say that all this happened, Martha?" asked Nick.

"About an hour, sir, as near as I can judge. I don't think the man was there more than ten minutes before they went out together. You don't suppose, do you, sir, that the man made her go out against her will? I just can't understand it at all, sir."

"Don't try to do so, Martha. Return to the house and wait there till your mistress returns. That is the only thing for you to do."

The girl turned and retraced her steps, and the two detectives continued on their way.

"The other side has fired the first gun," said Nick.

"So it seems," replied Chick. "But tell me what you make of this."

"Simply the fact that Dazaar has sent one of her expert hypnotists to capture Cora Tempest, and he has succeeded."

Nick stopped suddenly in the middle of the sidewalk and with his lips tightened across his teeth, he asked:

"Chick, did you ever have somebody at the other end of a telephone sass you?"

"You bet!"

"That's the way I feel now; but, old fellow, I'm go-

ing to run down that wire, so to speak, and I'm going to catch the fellow who is sassing me at the other end of it."

Five minutes later they arrived at the house, and even as Nick was ascending the steps to the front door, he felt that he was to find other evidence of the work of Dazaar as soon as he entered the house.

But he could not conjecture what he was to find, and he was in no way prepared for what was awaiting him, and he started back in amazement when he opened the door and entered.

Directly in front of him, and tied to the post of the balustrade was the naked and headless body of a man whose stiffened arms had been stretched out in a horizontal position, as if in supplication.

And around him, on the floor, there was not a drop of blood, nor was the clothing that had been taken from him anywhere discoverable.

And still, stranger than all, the house itself was as silent as a tomb, as if to suggest that the several servants, as well as Patsy, might have met with the same grewsome fate that had overtaken this headless victim of Dazaar.

CHAPTER IV.

A MESSAGE BROUGHT BY A CORPSE.

"Close the door, Chick," was Nick Carter's first order; and without another word he stepped forward close to the body, for the first thought that came to him was that it might be Patsy.

A second glance, however, convinced him that the body belonged to a stranger, and an examination of the hands and feet presently satisfied him that the man had been of middle age and that he was a foreigner and a laborer.

But the head was missing, and there was not a stitch of clothing anywhere to be found, nor was there a drop of blood in evidence, showing that the victim had been already dead for a considerable time when he was brought to the house.

Convinced as to these minor points, the detective and his assistant made a hasty but thorough examination of the house itself; and here again they were destined to meet with a surprise.

The house was deserted.

The big nurse, whose Nick kept steadily in his employ, the four servants and Patsy, who had been requested to remain at home until the return of his chief, had all disappeared—and they had left no sign of their going.

Not even a wad of paper had been thrown in a corner by Patsy for Nick to find.

There was nothing, save the dead and headless body in the hall and the utter absence of the servants, who should have been on hand and at their posts, to tell that strangers had entered the premises.

Nothing, apparently, had been disturbed.

Everything was in order.

Indeed, it appeared as if, with one accord, Patsy, the nurse and the four servants had gone out of the house together.

But for the headless body of the man in the hall, Nick might have regarded the absence of all his retainers almost as a coincidence—and yet, he knew well that nothing save force could have taken Patsy from his duty, or have induced him to disobey or transcend his orders.

"Chick," he said to his assistant, as soon as the search through the house was completed, "now that the ball is opened, it looks as if Dazaar intended to dance to fast music, doesn't it?"

"It does that."

"Suppose you step outside and tell me how many of those chaps we saw in the street are still in sight. While you are gone I will take another look at this corpse."

Chick obeyed, presently returning with the assurance that there was not now one of them in sight.

"Good!" said Nick. "They have withdrawn for the moment. Now let's have a look at this dead one and see if we can determine who he might have been."

The library table was cleared and a sheet placed over it. Next the corpse was taken down from its station against the post of the balustrade, and laid upon the sheet.

Then, silently, without a word to each other, the detectives began their examinations, and for ten minutes or more neither of them addressed the other; but at the end of that time, as if with one impulse, they each raised their heads and looked into each other's eyes.

"Well," said Nick, "what do you make of it all, Chick?"

"He was a foreigner, I should say—probably an Italian, although not a very dark one—and a laboring man, about forty years old, or more."

"Good, Chick! But let me hear how you arrive at those conclusions."

"There is a mark against his chest which shows where he has worn a St. Joseph over his heart, and leading from that and upon so much of the neck as is left for us to see, is the mark of the cord to which it was suspended. That cord was made of hair——"

"Splendid, Chick; I'm proud of you. Go on."

"It is easy to tell that the cord was made of hair by the character of the irritation it originally made against the skin, and which, although the charm was worn many years, has left its mark here. A cord would not have done that, for a cord would have worn out, or rotted, and therefore would have been changed many times during the years the amulet was worn. So in that case the mark would not have been present at all. It is a favorite custom among Savoyard Italians to have those cords braided from their mother's hair, or the hair of a sweetheart or wife. Hence this man was a Savoyard Italian."

"Good again; and anybody might see that he was a laboring man, from the condition of his hands and feet, and body generally. But how do you make him out to be forty years old, or more?"

"Also by his hands and feet, and by the lines upon them, as well as by the marks of the hair cord against his chest."

"But his hands and feet give us better proof of his age. He was forty-six, I should say."

"Yes; that is my idea."

"Have you any idea how he met his death, Chick?"

"No; there is no wound upon his body! hence I conclude that he might have been shot in the head, struck with a bludgeon, or——"

"No, Chick; you are away off. Haven't you discovered that there is almost no blood left in the body?"

"True; but I had not noticed it."

"See how transparent the skin is, even though the man has been dead a long time; and you can notice, too, where the flesh has sunk in over the larger arteries. The man was killed by the act of beheading him."

"Eh? Do you mean that he was not wounded at all until the knife which severed his head from his body was used?"

"Yes; that is what I do mean. He was not shot, nor hit with a bludgeon, nor was his throat cut till after he was rendered unconscious."

"But how can you tell that?"

"Easily enough. Notice his fingers and toes."

"Well?"

"If the man had been rendered unconscious by a blow, or by any sudden effect, the fingers and toes would have shown it. The nervous shock would have been communicated to the extremities, and the evidence of it would have remained in the shape of a contraction of the muscles; however slight it might have been it would still have been there."

"I see."

"Now there is not the slightest evidence of such a thing in this case; and——"

"Well?"

"We have already seen how our enemies have enticed one victim into their power."

"You refer to Miss Tempest?"

"Yes; they simply send a hypnotist to subdue her, and they lead her away, apparently a willing captive."

"Great Heaven, Nick! Do you suppose——"

"Hush, Chick! We must not suppose anything; we must know. I am using every effort at self-control and patience that I possess to be not too hasty in beginning my search for Cora Tempest. I can only hope that her enemies and mine have not first mesmerized and then beheaded her, as they did with this man here."

"You think, then, that he was hypnotized before he was killed?"

"I am sure of it."

"But why was he killed at all? Simply to frighten me, by bringing him here, do you suppose?"

"Oh, no. Dazaar would not go to all that trouble especially in the use of a body that is strange to me. They happened to have this corpse on hand, and wished to rid themselves of it. They were coming here, or they decided to do so at that time, and it occurred to them that to leave it here would serve two purposes. One, it would rid them of the cumbersome corpse; and the other, it would serve as a notice to me of what I might expect to find awaiting me later on."

"Did you ever hear of such unconscionable fiends, Nick?"

"For," continued Nick, unheeding the question, "they have only just begun their play. Inside of an hour Dazaar has made us feel, quite forcibly, that the strife has commenced. Cora has been led away from her home; Patsy and five of my retainers are captives in the hands of Dazaar, and we have discovered this dead man awaiting us inside my own house, and in the light of day. Surely that is warning enough that we are pitted against no common foe."

"Surely it should be, Nick."

"And now, do you realize that Dazaar has in her power no less than seven persons—Cora, Patsy, the nurse and the four servants—upon whose bodies she can play, just as the Bulgarian bandit plays upon the fingers and toes and ears of his captives when he sends them as a warning of what may happen next to the parties from whom he has demanded the prisoner's ransom?"

"Yes; I realize it—fully."

"It is just that sort of a warning which was intended to be conveyed when they placed the body of this Savoyard against the post of the balustrade in my hallway.

"It was as if Dazaar had said to me in so many words:

"'I send you this as an earnest of what I intend to do. This is the body of a stranger, and it is equivalent to sending you the smallest toe of one of your friends for whose liberty I have demanded a ransom. Presently I will send you the body of your meanest servant dead and headless also, but marked so that you will have no difficulty in recognizing it; later, I will regale you with the body of another servant, and then another, and so on till my supply has become exhausted.

"'But when that is so—when I have no more servants to send you, I will still have Patsy——'"

"Great Heaven, Nick!"

"'And after Patsy, I have Cora Tempest, and in the meantime I will have others, and still others and others, so that you shall be surfeited with the corpses supplied to you.'

"Bah, Chick! Can you not understand it all? Can you not see the way in which the plans of Dazaar are intended to work out? Can you not understand that this is no common game we have entered upon now, but that it is a war of extermination on both sides?

"Dazaar will lose no more time in dealing with tortures upon the bodies of her victims, for I am the only victim now, and the tortures will be directed solely against me and through the murder of those I love.

"I doubt, Chick, if she would take the trouble to capture me, in person, if she could do so, for she wants me at liberty, in order to make me suffer. But, Chick, do you beware! for as sure as there is a God above us, Dazaar will attack you next."

CHAPTER V.

A TERRIBLE THREAT.

The two detectives were interrupted at that moment by the ringing of the front doorbell, and leaving Chick with the body of the dead man, Nick stepped into the hall, closed the door behind him, and himself answered the ring.

A man of the nondescript pattern stood upon the threshold.

He was just such a person as one may see any day, seated upon the benches of Union or Madison or

Washington Square, with a muddy half of a morning paper held in his nerveless hands, his hat pulled down over his eyes, and with evidently no occupation in life, save that of existing through the intervals between nickels, which means to him beer and free lunches.

A shabby, unkempt, shadowy figure of what once might have become a man—a veritable Bedouin of the parks; and he stood, sleepy-eyed and listless upon the doorstep until Nick had thrown the door wide ajar, when, without a word, and without seeming to see the detective before him, he started forward through the open door, and so entered the house.

In the meantime, Nick observed him critically, and the instant the man was through the door he closed it and then seized the visitor by the arm and led him slowly back through the hall toward the door of the room wherein he had left Chick in company with the corpse.

Nor did he address the newcomer by a word; nor did the visitor speak.

The circumstance seemed a strange one indeed, and totally inexplicable, although Nick Carter seemed to have understood the condition of things from the instant he saw the stranger upon the doorstep.

When he opened the door, Chick started forward, but Nick raised one hand to indicate that he desired silence.

Then he led the man inside the room, past the table upon which the corpse was stretched, turning him so that he could not help seeing the headless body if there were any sight in the depth of his staring eyes.

But there was no sight there.

The man looked without seeing. He passed the corpse without discovering it. He moved mechanically, as if he were propelled by some volition that was not his own, and he had neither eyes nor ears for anything that was near him.

"What does it mean?" exclaimed Chick, startled in spite of himself.

"A messenger from Dazaar," replied Nick, laconically. And then, after a moment of silence, he added: "Could you not see at a glance that this poor fellow is under the influence of one of those strange sp of hypnotic influence of which Dazaar and her foll ers are so thoroughly masters?"

"Yes; I see it now."

"This man has no idea where he is. If he sho awaken now, he would be astonished beyond meas not to find himself seated upon one of the park benc where, without doubt, they discovered him and adap him to their uses.

"He will not speak until he is spoken to. He wo stand there just as he is for hours—perhaps for da if his strength should hold out; and when he fina awakens he will have no recollection of anything t has happened while he was in this state. It is a ty of hypnotic power of which I know nothing, but I know that it exists, and here we have a genuine e dence of it."

"But, Nick, why is the fellow here?"

"He is here because he was sent here."

"But why?"

"Don't you remember Dazaar's fondness for sen ing messages?"

"Certainly."

"Formerly she used to write them. In the begi ning, there was scarcely a day when the human fie did not regale me with written threats—boasting le ters, warning me what I might next expect in the w of vengeance; but she has abandoned that habit."

"So it would seem."

"And now she sends her messages by corpses, livi and dead, for this fellow is no better now than a livin corpse. He should be thankful that he was not selecte for the first message she chose to send—the on brought by that headless fellow yonder—the silen message which means so much and which I so readil understand.

"And now, Chick, we will find out what this mes senger has to say, for he will repeat what he h been ordered to say—no more and no less."

Nick turned then to the shabby messenger, and fix ing his eyes upon him, said in a low and even tone:

"Who are you?"

"I am the messenger of Dazaar," replied the man, in a hollow monotone which was utterly expressionless.

"What is your own name?"

"I have forgotten it."

"From whence do you come?"

"From Dazaar."

"And you have a message to deliver?"

"Yes."

"To whom?"

"To Nick Carter."

"I am Nick Carter. What is your message?"

"Dazaar has sent you the headless body of an Italian whom he beheaded while the man was still alive and in the hypnotic state."

"Yes."

"Dazaar has now in captivity your young assistant, Patsy."

"That is, I suppose, also true."

"Dazaar also holds as prisoners four of your servants and a woman who was a nurse in your establishment."

"Well: go on. What more?"

"Also, Dazaar has enticed away from her home a woman you love—a Miss Cora Tempest."

"Proceed; must I question you all through in order to receive the message? Proceed."

"Dazaar intends to send to you, one by one, the headless trunks of all these people I have named. Afterward, their heads will be cured and mumified, and sent to decorate the halls of the friends of Dazaar, in Thibet. But first these bodies will be sent to you."

"Well? And what then?"

"They will come to you one by one; the servants first—four of them; then the nurse; next, your assistant, Patsy; after that, if it is possible to capture him, and there can be no doubt of that, your assistant, Chick."

Nick's eyes sought Chick's for an instant, and both men smiled; but there was a shadow which was not entirely humor in the smile that covered the expression of the assistant.

"And after Chick," proceeded the messenger, "Cora Tempest."

"And how am I to expect these presents from Dazaar?" asked Nick. "Am I to be regaled with her souvenirs of esteem every day?"

The messenger shook his head; but he did not offer to go, and Nick rightly conjectured that his message was not yet entirely delivered.

"You have more to say to me?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Say it, and begone."

"Dazaar will compromise with you."

"Indeed. That is news. What is the compromise she proposes?"

"That you become a member of the society of Devil Worshipers, and so subvert yourself to the will of Dazaar."

"And how am I to do that?"

"If you consent to do it, you have only to make it known to Dazaar by tracing the shape of a heart, in chalk, upon the pavement at the corner where you first discovered the sign of the Devil Worshipers to-day."

"And if I do that?"

"Dazaar will communicate with you again for further instruction."

"And if I consent to do all that, will the murder of my friends and servants be stopped?"

"At once."

"And will Patsy and Chick be spared?"

"To a certainty."

"And Cora Tempest?"

"Yes."

"Forever?"

"Yes."

"I will think it over. Can you carry a message back from me to Dazaar?"

"No."

"Then how am I to answer the message?"

"By tracing the shape of a heart upon the pavement, as directed, or by leaving the pavement bare. There is no other way."

"And when, if at all, must this tracing of a heart be made upon the pavement?"

"Before nightfall to-morrow."

"About twenty-five hours, then."

"Before nightfall to-morrow."

"Have you delivered all your message now?"

"Yes; all of it, save to say that you had best hear to the wishes of Dazaar. You have only to join the Devil Worshipers, acknowledge Dazaar as your chief and master, and swear to abide by the rule of Dazaar for one year; after that you will be free again—as free as now."

"I will think of it. Have you finished?"

"Yes."

"Then I will take you to the door and you may return from whence you came."

"But," interposed Chick, "should he not be followed?"

"To what purpose?" replied Nick. "This man will only return to his bench in the park, where presently he will awaken and wonder why he has slept so long. He will have no recollection of anything that has happened while he has slept."

Then he took the messenger's arm, led him to the door, put him outside and closed the door against him.

And then he returned to the room where he had left Chick.

CHAPTER VI.

"I SHALL TRACE THE HEART UPON THE PAVEMENT."

"Chick," said the detective, "lock this door and then come with me to the study. I have orders for you;" and then, five minutes later, when they were in the sanctum of the great detective, Nick delivered his orders.

"Chick," he said, "it has been my habit of late to discuss with you every step I have taken in all of my cases; but for the present I intend to make a change."

"How is that, Nick? What do you mean?"

"I mean that for the balance of the time while Dazaar is on earth, I shall have no further discussions; I will give you your orders how I expect you to act, and I shall expect you to obey them implicitly, and without question. From having been my associate and confidant for a long time, you are to descend the scale to the position of assistant again. The time has come when I must act alone."

"Have I ever refused to obey you?"

"No; but I have grown into the habit of reasoning with you. For the present that must cease. If I am to save the lives for which I am held responsible by the force of circumstances, I must work as I was taught to work by my father—entirely upon my own resources."

"Very well, chief, I am ready for orders."

"Good! First, you will go to your own den and make yourself up to represent me in my natural person. Give yourself the best make-up you ever consummated. We must be as alike as two peas in a pod."

"I can do that all right."

"I know you can. Next, you will go to police headquarters and deliver the keys of this house to Inspector McClusky. You will tell him about the headless corpse, and you will ask him, after he has had it removed, to place a guard inside the house which will never leave it until I order them withdrawn. After that is done, you will go to the corner of Fifth Avenue and Thirty-fifth Street, and with a piece of chalk you will draw a heart upon the pavement, where we saw the sign of the Devil Worshipers."

"But, Nick——"

"Stop where you are! No argument. I am giving orders now."

"Very well, sir."

"After you have done that, you will go to the Waldorf, and you will loiter around the billiard room there until you hear from me, or see me, when I will have further instructions for you."

"All right."

"One thing more."

"Well?"

"If, after you have traced the heart on the pavement, you should be approached and receive any communication of any kind from Dazaar, or from one of the agents of Dazaar, you will receive it exactly as if you were really Nick Carter, and you will acquiesce in everything that is demanded of you."

"Very good, sir."

"And later, when you see me, you will communicate to me every word and sign of that message, whatever it may be. Let there be no mistake about that."

"There shall be none."

"And one thing more."

"Yes."

"If you should chance upon Ten-Ichi, no matter what his own ideas may be or what his engagements are, tell him if he loves me and would serve me, to remain with you until I see him. I want Ten-Ichi."

As if in reply to the detective's statement, there came a gentle tap at that instant upon the study door, and leaping toward it, Nick threw it open like a flash.

"Ten-Ichi!" he exclaimed. "How did you get into the house?"

"With the key that I carried away with me to Japan, and brought back with me," replied the Mikado's son, entering, and grasping the hand of the man he loved so well.

After the greetings were over, Nick turned again to Chick.

"Go, Chick," he said, "upon the duties I have given you. Carry out my orders to the letter: only be careful to make yourself so like me that the shrewdest emissaries of Dazaar cannot detect the difference."

Then he turned to Ten-Ichi.

"Now, lad," he said, "we have no time for sentimentalities. You have something to tell me."

"Yes."

"Then let me hear what it is, and in as few words as possible."

"Very well. You know that once, long ago, in Japan, when I was a mere lad, I joined the Devil Worshipers."*

"Yes; I know. Go on."

"Because of the things I had learned in that way I was enabled to serve you once, when this Dazaar first appeared on the scene in this country, and when I happened to be here, learning from you the profession of detective."†

"Yes; of course I remember it all, very well."

"It was something more than a year ago when we believed that Dazaar was really dead, and that we had buried the fiend in a tomb in one of your cemeteries."*

"True."

"I never, in my heart, credited the belief that Dazaar was really dead. I did believe that Irma Plavatski, in whose form Dazaar had appeared among us, was dead, but I nevertheless believed that Dazaar had already arranged some method of return to life by means of some one of the numberless secrets of their craft."

"Well, Ten-Ichi? You have told me nothing as yet, and I am very impatient to-day."

"I must indulge in this preamble in order to tell what I have to impart."

"Very well; take your own method."

"After you left Japan there was little for me to do in my father's palace. He would not permit me to go to the war; he would hardly allow me out of his sight, and I began to think about you and the pleasant times I had enjoyed here; and in thinking of all that, I remembered Dazaar and the Devil Worshipers."

"And in thinking of me and of the Devil Worshipers, it occurred to you that if you should resume your acquaintance with the fiendish set you might hear of something to my advantage, or at least discover if Dazaar were really dead; is that the idea?"

"Exactly the idea. I renewed my acquaintance with them, for they are numerous in Japan, and became again a member of one of their cliques."

"Well?"

"And so I learned long ago that not only did Dazaar intend to return to life again, but that the incarnated devil would also return in the form of Irma Plavatski; but do you know why?"

"Why Dazaar wished to live again?"

"No; why Dazaar wished to remain Irma Plavatski?"

"Why?"

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* Read 295 of NICK CARTER WEEKLY.

† Read 870, 873 and 874, NICK CARTER WEEKLY.

*Read 377 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY

"Because as Irma Plavatski, she learned to love you! Because she swore to herself, even at the time she was making her confession to you before she died, that the day should come when you would belong to her, body and soul! Because all the devil, all the wickedness, all the craftiness, all the hate and longing that is in her is bound up in her desire for you!"

"Bosh!"

"It is not bosh! It is true!"

"Well; go on."

"I discovered all these things through the Devil Worshipers of Japan, and I found out, also, the time when she intended to reappear. That is why I am here."

"Well, you have still more to tell, haven't you?"

"Certainly. I secured my father's consent that I should return here and serve you, and knowing about what time Dazaar intended to reappear, I arranged to be here at that time. I nearly missed it; but I am here. Wait, chief, I have not quite done."

"Go ahead."

"Dazaar—or Irma—arranged with her friends, through Buck Granger, so that her tomb would be constructed according to her directions. Then shortly after she was placed in it—that same night, in fact—the freshly laid cement was loosened and she was taken from the tomb, while it was resealed so cleverly as to defy detection that it had been molested at all.

"What Dazaar did after that, during the year that intervened before she reappeared on the scene, I do not know, but I have an idea that she returned to Thibet to make her peace with the powers there; at all events she is here now and prepared to win you to her will."

"Which, of course, she can never do."

"Nevertheless, beware of her, for she is powerful. Will you believe me when I tell you the number of her followers at this moment in this city, each one sworn to do her will to the death?"

"I will believe whatever you tell me is true, Ten-Ichi," replied Nick.

"There are more than six hundred of them here. They have gathered from all parts of the earth. They have come from north, from south, from east and from west. There are men of almost every nationality among them, and they are sworn for their lives to do her bidding in this subjugation of the great detective, Nick Carter."

"But why all this, Ten-Ichi? There must be something more than the mere passion of a fiendish woman."

"There is something more indeed."

"What is it?"

"When Dazaar long ago forsook manhood, and chose to become a woman, he lost caste among the high priests and lamas of Thibet. She, as Irma Plavatski, can only regain that prestige she has lost by the winning of you."

"Ah! Now I understand why——"

"Go on; but no, you need not, for I know what you would say. You know now why she has offered you a compromise."

"Yes; that is it."

"And has sent you word that if you will consent to join the Devil Worshipers and to give yourself body and soul to them, which means to her, for one year, she will permit the prisoners she has taken to go free, she will destroy no more lives, and she will, after that year, leave you to your own desires."

"All that is as you say, Ten-Ichi, but how do you know it all?"

"I haven't been in the city almost a week for nothing. I have been on the alert. I have spied upon them as I could not have done had they suspected that I was here; and they would not only have suspected it but have known it had I dared to come directly to you.

"To-day, when you and Chick read the signs on the pavement, you guessed correctly when you decided that they were there simply as an enticement for you; I was near at hand at that moment, and when you walked away in one direction and Chick in the other, Dazaar herself drove up in a carriage to the very spot where you had been standing, and was met there by one of her princely followers, who came out of the club.

"I crept under the carriage and listened to them,

by doing so I learned of what had even then taken —at least, it was too late to stop it. I refer to abduction of the young lady from the house op e, as well as what has happened here in this house at is, all save the dead body of the Italian; that not mentioned.

Later I followed the man who followed you, as know, for you recognized me when I purposely ded with Chick, so that I could warn him.

There, sir, with one addition, is all the story I e to tell."

"And what is the addition, Ten-Ichi?"

"This: A messenger was to come to you offering a promise. You may already have seen him. You e to trace a heart on the pavement——"

"Yes; I know about that, and I have decided upon answer."

"I am glad of that. What is it to be?"

"I shall trace the heart upon the pavement. I shall ear to accept the compromise. I shall join the vil Worshipers and take their initiation to the end, before it is over and through with, I will have done which will save the lives of my friends, which will e my self-respect; and which will put Dazaar for- r beyond the power of doing further harm. Come at may, I am resolved on this!"

CHAPTER VII.

A HARD PROPOSITION TO DOWN.

Ten Ichi regarded his chief with undisguised ad ration.

"Bravo!" he said; and then, rising and taking two three turns across the room and back again, he ssenly stopped in front of the detective and said, wly:

"It is the only way in which you can win the fight, ich is now to the death, between you and Dazaar."

"I have come to that determination this evening," lied Nick.

"But I know it is the only way."

"You have a definite reason for being so positive?"

"Certainly I have."

"Well—what is it?"

"I should have advised this course—if you would have permitted me to advise—had you not already adopted it; as it is, my task becomes easier."

"Time flies, Ten-Ichi. Let us get done with what we have to say."

"You will trace the heart upon the pavement some time to-night, I suppose."

"Yes."

"Then the initiation will be arranged for to-morrow night. You have been in a Devil Worshiper's den before and you know how it appears."

"Yes; I think I have some recollection of the time." said Nick, grimly.

"This one will be a thousandfold worse than that; and you and I will be alone there, for the watch around the vicinity will be kept so shrewdly and carefully that there will be no chance of our smuggling help of any kind near the place."

"These are all the help I shall ask for," replied Nick, holding out his mighty arms and shutting his jaws together with a determined snap.

"You will need them and all the strength there is in them," said Ten-Ichi, "before the night of to-morrow is past; and still, there may be help at hand of which you do not know, at present."

"Then tell me what it is; I need to know all that it is possible to know before I thrust myself into the lion's jaws."

"It is only this, chief. There are many Devil Worshipers who have joined the order within the last year —in Japan."

"Well, what of that?"

"The sudden growth of the order there has been due to my efforts."

"Ah! I think I understand."

"I have many faithful followers over there, chief. There are thousands who would go to death willingly with me or for me, because I happen to be the son of my august father; and there are as many more who would do the same for my own sake."

"Well?"

"From these I have recruited Devil Worshipers. From these I have chosen followers who first swore allegiance to me, and then joined this infamous order; but they have joined it only to serve me, and—a score of them have come here with me."

"That is good work, Ten-Ichi. That was foresight, indeed."

"It was one of these who was with me this afternoon. All of them will be present at the meeting when you are to receive your initiation."

"But how can they be present at that meeting?"

"Because they are among the number who have been ordered here by the general clique. They are Japanese wrestlers and athletes, everyone of them. They are picked men, selected by me for their bravery, their strength, their adroitness and their loyalty to me. I shall be at the meeting, and my score of followers will be there. But——"

"Well; but what?"

"We will only be a handful among many. I have told you that there are upwards of six hundred Devil Worshipers in the city; every last one of them who is able to walk will be present at that meeting."

"Then where in the world will they congregate? There is no place large enough for a secret meeting of that magnitude, which the police will not discover before the meeting assembles."

"Yes; there is a place and they have found it. It is in a locality north of the city, in what you call, I think, Westchester County. There is much wild and mountainous country in that region, and in one place, shut in by the forests, there is an old mansion which has been deserted for many years. It is far away from every other habitation, and there is no road nor path near it. The meeting will be there.

"How you will be taken to it I do not know; but let me suggest one thing."

"What is that?"

"Once you have traced the heart on the pavement, and thus signified your intention to accept the terms offered by Dazaar, make yourself utterly passive. Let them do with you as you will, even to the end of the initiation. The time to act will come after that."

"I had already determined upon that point."

"Now, have you orders for me?"

"You seem to act pretty well without orders, Ten-Ichi. You have been a whole year preparing for business while I had forgotten that such a person as Dazaar ever existed."

"I only happened by accident to learn of the plot against you," said Ten-Ichi, modestly.

"You have done splendidly, my boy. Now, tell me what you said a moment ago that you knew of the kidnaping of Miss Tempest at about the time it occurred."

"Yes."

"Do you know where they have taken her?"

"Yes; to the house in Westchester that I have described."

"And is Patsy there also? And the others?"

"I suppose they are all there; I do not know."

"Then what is to hinder us from rescuing them this very night?"

"This: Because the only way in which you will ever see any of them again, alive, will be to join the Devil Worshipers."

"How do you mean?"

"I don't know about Patsy and the others, but I do know about Miss Tempest."

"Well, what about her?"

"She is held there under a special guard. Her life is valued no more than the life of a worm or an insect. Those who guard her have orders at the first alarm of an attack upon the house, or at the first suggestion of a possibility of her being freed, to kill her without waiting for particulars—and there are too many of them to overcome by stealth. At the first alarm, one of those deadly daggers of Dazaar will be driven through Miss Tempest's heart. No; there is only one way to save her now."

"And that is by joining the Devil Worshipers."

"Yes; that is the only way."

"Then so be it; I will join."

"And you have no orders for me?"

"No; save to do as you have done, and to look for me at the house in Westchester, when the followers of Dazaar shall bring me there."

hen, I will go now; but wait, there is one thing
. Chick will wish to follow you there, or to go
you."

know it, and he must not do so."

No; his life would not be worth thirty cents were
dozen times more clever than he is. I know
ool I speak."

soon as Nick was alone he busied himself in pre-
ng for the great things that were to happen before
until visit his own house again, for he had no in-
tion of returning to it until after the initiation of
Devil Worshipers.

nd when he finally did depart, he felt that he was
pared to face a hundred men with the resources
had concealed about him.

Desperate circumstances demand desperate reme-
," he murmured to himself when his toilet was com-
ted. "If I am surrounded by four walls I do not
how far apart they may be now, and if there are
hundred men within those four walls, it matters lit-
if they all attack me at once, if only I can arrange
as to keep the mass of them in front of me for a
e time. But if the Devil Worshipers should strip
before the initiation, why, then, I must rely upon
muscles, my strength, my agility and my fund of
urce. Whatever happens, the Devil Worshipers
ll find that Nick Carter is a hard proposition to
wn."

CHAPTER VIII.

PREPARING FOR THE INITIATION.

Nick Carter crossed the street to the house of Cora
mpest.

"Now, Martha," he said to the maid when she came
the door to admit him, "just a few questions, if you
ase."

"Yes, sir."

"You are not to worry. I happen to know where
r mistress is, and that she will be all right. She
s gone out of town for a little time and will not re-
n before the day after to-morrow. In the meantime
are to act just as usual here."

"Very good, sir. I feel greatly relieved, for I was worried about her."

"I want you to promise me that you won't go far away from the house until your mistress returns to it."

"All right, sir."

"And now you may return to your own quarters. I wish to pass a few moments in the library, and I will let myself out when I am ready to depart."

"Thank you, sir."

Martha returned to the basement and Nick betook himself to the library.

He crossed the room directly to the table, and then, as his eyes rested upon a pad of paper, he started and uttered a quick breath of surprise, for scrawled upon the pad, as if in great haste and also as if the eyes had not followed the writing when it was done, he read these words:

"Help, Nick! Dazaa——"

That was all.

"Poor girl," mused the detective. "She had a pencil in her fingers when that devil who mesmerized her entered the room, and she knew the instant her eyes met his that she was done for. She managed to write that much before she lost control of herself, and he was so taken up in hypnotizing her that he never noticed it—or did not care about it."

It was quite dark when he was again upon the street, and he betook himself at once to the Waldorf, where he entered the café and ordered a substantial dinner.

While he was seated there, and his face was toward the door, he several times noticed that swarthy-complexioned gentlemen passed the doorway.

Presently one of them entered and half crossed the café, but happening to raise his eyes he discovered Nick seated at a table and complacently devouring his dinner.

It was evident that the man was greatly surprised, for he came to an abrupt stop and stared.

Nick, however, seemed to pay no attention to him, but continued with his meal; and the dark-complexioned fellow presently turned and hurried out of the room.

Then Nick permitted himself to smile.

"He has struck the first snag," he mused. "He and some of his friends have been for an hour or more keeping their eyes on a certain Nick Carter who is doubtless playing billiards in the billiard room, and lo! having just left that individual in the billiard room, this fellow walks in here and discovers that in some mysterious manner Nick Carter has got here before him. Now he has gone back, but only to find that Nick Carter is still playing billiards, and in another moment he will be here again to stare some more, and to wonder which is Nick Carter, after all.

"I wonder if Chick has drawn the heart on the pavement yet? If he hasn't they will be puzzled, and they won't know which is which until he really does it; and then they will wonder who in the devil I am. Hello! here comes the startled fellow now."

The same swarthy individual re-entered the café and crossed deliberately to the table next to Nick, and seating himself there, commenced deliberately to stare at the detective.

"I wonder what the game is now?" mused the detective. "Evidently he wishes to speak to me, but he wants to force me to speak first. All right, I'll take him up on the proposition."

He turned slowly and faced the man; and then, with a smile, he said:

"You seem to be interested in my appearance, sir?"

"Ah! Pardone me, eef you plee-ase. Yase, yase. I haf wondair eef you be Mistair Car-teer—no?"

"Certainly I am Mr. Carter. But I don't happen to know you. Who are you?"

"Ah! Pardone, sair, but I refair to zee Mistair Car-teer. Ah! You are zat Mistair Car-teer—no?—eh? vot? And ees there one othar Mistair Car-teer? No?—eh? vot?"

"Oh," replied Nick, "there are a lot of us. A half a dozen at least."

"Vot?—eh?—so many? Seex? Seex Mistair Car-teers?"

The strange little man leaped from his chair and was gone, nor did the detective see him again; but after that, one by one, three swarthy individuals, all faultlessly dressed and at ease in the corridors of the great hotel, entered the room, stared at him a moment, then went out again.

And all the time Nick sat there smiling plac while he continued with his dinner.

But when it was finished and he had paid the ch he left the table and strolled slowly into the billi room.

Sure enough, it was as he had figured. His dou —Chick, of course—was playing billiards at one the tables, and as Nick approached him more than of the occupants of the room stared at them.

Well they might have done so, for there seemed to be a single point of difference in their appearar

If one were standing at either end of the table, while your back was turned they changed places, would not have known that either had moved, so p cisely alike were they in everything, even to the min est details of dress.

Nor was this all that tended to astonish the peo who were observing them.

As the two men approached each other, each tended his right hand, and each called out, in voi which sounded as if they might have proceeded fr the same throat:

"Hello, Carter, old man, how are you?" and:

"Hello, Carter, old chap; glad to see you."

And then they shook hands with apparently utmost cordiality.

The gentleman who was engaged in the game billiards with Chick came around the table and marked, with some jocularity:

"Would you mind telling me which gentleman I playing with? I don't think I care to engage both you."

"Oh, take your choice," replied Nick. "We pl about the same game."

"Twins?" asked the gentleman.

"No; no relation at all," replied Nick.

"What! You have the same name, haven't yo I think I heard you both use it."

"Oh, yes. The same names fore-and aft."

"Eh?"

"Front and back, I mean. First and last. See it now?"

"Rather remarkable, isn't it, to be a coincidence?"

"We've gotten used to it; eh, Carter?"

"Quite," said Chick, going to the table with his cue.

There were only a few points left to make in the game and Chick quickly ran it out, and then he rejoined Nick, who had taken a seat at one of the tables near by.

"Have you chalked the heart on the pavement yet?" asked Nick.

"No. There was time enough after you arrived, and I thought there was such a thing as your changing your mind; so I waited."

"You may leave it till about midnight."

"You are still intent upon accepting that bluff of Dazaar's and taking the initiation of the Devil Worshipers?"

"No; I am going to have you take it."

"What?"

"I'm going to send you to take it for me."

Chick regarded his companion with so much incredulity in his gaze that Nick laughed outright.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"I am trying to determine whether you are in earnest or not."

"I was never more in earnest in my life."

"But—I say, you know, it doesn't sound a bit like you."

"Why not?"

"Because it doesn't. If I had had any idea that you meant me to take the initiation for you, I should not have raised a single objection; but all the same it isn't like you; not at all."

"Again, why not?"

"Because—I say, have you found something where the danger will be about ten times greater than it will in that den of devils?"

"I think, Chick, we will both see all the danger we care to witness before we are thirty-six hours older than we are now."

"Ha! I thought so."

"Thought what?"

"You have discovered that there will be more danger in staying outside and looking like Nick Carter than there will be in going on the inside and taking chances with Dazaar, and hence, as always, you select the most dangerous post for yourself."

"Who in blazes cares a rap about the danger, Chick? Do you?"

"You know that I do not."

"Well, do you think I do?"

"You know I don't."

"Then what are you driving at?"

"I'm not doing the driving; you are."

"Right you be, sonny; see that you don't forget that either."

"I won't."

"The fact is, Chick, Nick Carter, in *propria persona*, is not in the slightest danger, physically, from those devils, while everybody who knows him is in danger, and mighty serious danger at that. I had a long talk with Ten-Ichi after you left, and what passed between us decided me on a new plan—at least, it is partly new. You see, the point is, I want you inside that house, and I don't think you can get to it, even, unless you are taken there in my place.

"On the other hand, I think I can get to it and inside it myself.

"Now, my lad, I have several reasons for desiring you to fill my place to-morrow night, for that is when the initiation is to be, according to Ten-Ichi."

"One reason is sufficient for me."

"I know that; but you shall have them all:

"First, I don't think you could get to the house alone, and I know you would try, in spite of any orders I might give you. If you tried it, you would get yourself killed, and I'm not ready to part with you just yet.

"Second, I am equally certain that I can get to the house, and get inside of it, too, and you may assure yourself if I was not positive of it I would not run the risk of being left on the outside when such interesting things are to happen.

"Third, as Nick Carter, one of us must take the initiation, and it is more than likely that those devils

will strip you, or at least go through your clothes and take everything you have about you, even if they do not send you into the ordeal naked."

"That's pleasant."

"Yes; it's all as pleasant—as the devil, isn't it?"

"Quite so."

"Fourth, I haven't any stomach for being deprived of my clothes, for I've got them loaded to the muzzle for bear, and I want to take into that meeting with me everything I have concealed about my person at the present moment. I'll make them think that even one man can be a mighty dangerous proposition when he is properly loaded.

"Fifth, as Nick Carter, undergoing the initiation, all eyes would be centered on me. That would bother me in the carrying out of my plans. I want to get Cora Tempest out of danger the very first thing I do after I enter that house, and if I go into it to take that initiation it would have to be the very last thing I did.

"Sixth—well, there are about ninety-nine more reasons, each better than the others, but I think you have heard enough, so now if you will take yourself outside and make a picture of a heart on the corner of Thirty-fifth and the avenue, you will find me waiting for you in room 1535 when you return. Come straight to the room, tell me all that has happened, and then I'll tell you what to do. Now go and trace the heart for the Princess of Hades."

CHAPTER IX.

THE LONE HOUSE IN THE WOODS.

"Well?" asked Nick, when Chick entered the room where he was awaiting him, a half hour later.

"Well? I should say well! and with a vengeance," replied Chick, throwing himself into a chair. Then leaning forward he added in a low tone:

"What language do you think it would be safest for us to use? Let's try the Oaxacan; I don't believe any of those devils understand that." Then changing immediately, he said:

"We've got to talk quickly, too, for they are waiting for me—about a regiment of them, I should imagine."

"What happened?" said Nick, using the same dialect.

"This: I carried a piece of chalk with me from the billiard room and as soon as I arrived at the corner of Thirty-fifth Street I traced a good-sized heart on the pavement, and then stood back to admire it. But, bless you, I hadn't more than got my eyes fixed on it when I felt a hand on my shoulder and a voice said in my ear:

"'You will be one with us, brother.'

"'Bet your life,' I replied. 'What is the next move?'

"'You will remain here as our guest in the hotel, until to-morrow night, and then we will take you to the meeting,' replied my informant; and then I noticed that there were half a dozen swarthy chaps grouped around me.

"Well, we turned back toward the hotel, and they all fell into line; when we got here I thought I could deceive them best by telling them the truth, so I said that I had promised to meet the gentleman who resembled me so strongly and that they would have to wait for me, whereupon one of them asked me if he was also a detective.

"'Not on your life,' I told them.

"There, that is all. I have got to go down and rejoin my brothers now. Give me what orders you have to give."

In as few words as possible Nick related all that Ten-Ichi had told him about the help that would be at hand, and having instructed Chick as fully as was possible under the circumstances, he closed by adding:

"You may rely upon the fact that I will be near at hand somewhere; probably inside the room where the initiation takes place, for I mean to go rather thoroughly through the house before it takes place, if possible."

And then they parted, Chick to rejoin his new associates, and Nick to retire for the night, for there was absolutely nothing more he could do before the following day.

As Chick expected, he found one of the men awaiting him in the hallway just outside the door of Nick's room, and another was stationed farther down the hall; there was still another at the bottom of the elevator shaft, and a fourth was in the billiard room, to which he directed his steps at once.

But he met each of them with a smile and a nod, as if, having cast the die, he was resolved to see it through cheerfully.

The man who waited for him in the hall and who met him as he came out of Nick's room, asked him what had passed between him and his friend; but Chick only laughed as he replied:

"That, my friend, is distinctly none of your busi-

news; at least, not now. If after to-morrow night I find that you have a right to ask such questions, I will take you with me the next time I call upon him."

* * * * *

Nick Carter retired at about the hour of twelve-thirty.

At two-thirty he awoke, leaped out of the bed, glanced at his watch, and proceeded to don his clothing with great speed.

At two-forty-five he walked out of the hotel through the Thirty-third Street entrance, and, turning eastward, sought the Third Avenue elevated road, where he took a train and remained upon it until it would take him no farther.

There, he descended to the ground to find awaiting him, at the foot of the steps, an old-fashioned country carryall with an older-fashioned horse, if age were a criterion, and a man who seemed to be quite as hairy as the horse.

"Good," said Nick. "I see you received my message all right. Did you also get the letter?"

"Sure I did."

"And have you found such a place as I described in it?"

"Well, I ain't exactly found it, but I know where to find it. Fact is, I didn't have to look very far for information after I got your letter with the description."

"No! Why not?"

"Well, because it was a purty good description of the house I was born in."

"You don't say so! That's lucky!"

"Fact. I was born there, and so were all my brothers and sisters, and my father and grandfather before me. It belongs to me now, but the house is so old it can't be lived in, and it has all gone to rack and ruin long ago; besides, the town cut the road through in a new place, which left it away off'n the line of travel, and now I reckon there don't anybody but tramps and thieves stop there for a lodging. I can't imagine what you want to go there for, Mr. Carter."

"Never mind that. How long will it take me to get there?"

"An hour and a half, or thereabouts."

"I want to get as near to the house as possible without being seen by anybody."

"Well, that's dead easy. I can put you clean inside of it without anybody's seeing you, if you want; and that in broad daylight, too."

"How can you do that?" It is exactly what I want."

"Well, you see, there is a deep ravine about thirty rods from the old place, and there used to be a big iron drain pipe from the house into the ravine. That pipe weren't no sort of use where it was, and I could make use of it somewhere else, so I tore it out. I reckon it left a hole big enough for you to crawl through without getting your clothes very dirty at that."

"Just the thing. Where does the drain lead to, in the house?"

"To the cellar; and there are two flights of stairs—that is, there used to be, but they are both rotted down now—which led up, one to the setting room and the other to the hall back of the kitchen."

"Good! That's all right. That is all I need to know. Take me to the ravine and tell me which way to go after we get there; and get me there before daylight; that's all I ask."

"I'll do it, Mr. Carter, or kill the hoss."

And he did do it.

Nick found it very dark and dubious work, finding his way through a ravine in total blackness, where he had never been before, but now and then he pressed the button of his little searchlight long enough to guide his steps, and so he presently found the mouth of the old drain which had been described to him.

It had been a lucky thought, his remembering Hiram Tompkins, who was called the walking cyclopedia of Westchester County, and in this instance, at least, the man had proved his claim to the title.

Daylight was just asserting itself when Nick arrived at the old drain, and he seated himself at the mouth of it, screened by the bushes which grew around it, and waited for the full light of day to spread over the world.

He ate a couple of sandwiches while he waited, and after an hour, when the sun was up, he cast one last look around him, and then, with never another look behind him, plunged into the hole in the earth, where few men, under the circumstances, would have dared to enter.

* * * * * * *

Singly and in pairs, soon after the advent of day, men began to arrive at the old house by devious ways and routes.

The house itself was so situated that it was almost impossible to guess that any person encountered upon one of the roads near it, could be going there. And woods, deep and dense, surrounded it on every side, so that, although before nightfall there were hundreds of people in the old house, it was doubtful if any resident of that district suspected that there were strangers in the neighborhood.

Nevertheless, the Devil Worshipers had arrived at their place of meeting, and the great ceremony of the initiation of Nick Carter into the mysteries of their terrible order was ready to proceed, for Chick, and his bodyguard, had arrived also.

CHAPTER X.

THE DEVIL'S WEDDING.

If you, reader, could have stood outside the house and watched the arrivals, and later, had been permitted to enter and view the huge room which had been prepared for the ceremony of initiation, no doubt you would have wondered where all the paraphernalia could have come from.

The room itself had been prepared for the uses to which it was now to be put, by tearing out all the partitions on the second floor, leaving only an upright here and there to support the floor above it.

Next, every window had been securely boarded up and every chink through which a possible ray of light might be able to sift, had been stuffed with cotton.

After that the walls had been draped, and every bit of the drapery was of blood red. Even the floor and the ceiling were covered with it, so that there was one mass of red on every side, as well as above and below.

Next, there were no chairs in the room; in fact, not an article of furniture of any description, save that in the very center of the hall-like place there was a circular platform raised about fourteen inches above the floor, and upon this platform was a round stool. Platform and stool were also covered with red.

And there was one other object of interest.

At one end of the room, supported against the wall, was a huge shield, as red as blood, and from it dangled a series of straps, while sticking in it, in the form of a glittering cross, were scores of daggers, sharp pointed and wicked in their appearance.

Such, my readers, was the room in which the initiation was to be held, and so it appeared to Chickering Carter, when, shortly before midnight, he was thrust into it from a trapdoor over the stairs.

And one glance at him would have convinced you that Nick had figured well when he had delegated Chick to fill that part of the performance for him, for the assistant had been divested of his own clothing, and in its place was a suit of tight-fitting garments of the same blood-red hue as the decorations; in fact, he was arrayed in a veritable devil's dress, surmounted by a close-fitting hood, from which suggestive horns protruded into the air.

So much of his face as appeared at all, and that was merely a circular part of it, which included his eyes, nose and mouth, had been dyed the same deep red.

Thus, Chick was thrust into the huge apartment where the Devil Worshipers were to meet and where they were to initiate him into their order.

He believed himself to be utterly alone when, in obedience to the orders given him, he sprang up the stairs and through the open trap which was immediately closed after he had passed through; but while he stood there, half dazed by the brilliant lights after the utter darkness of a moment before, his eyes fell upon the platform in the middle of the room, and he saw the top of it, on which the stool rested, disappear from sight.

Then, as he watched, the figures of a group of devils dressed like himself appeared to rise out of the abyss before him.

They ascended slowly until their feet were level with the edge of the platform, when they stepped off on the floor, and, dropping upon their knees, began the formation of a circle around the space inclosed by the platform.

Scarcely had they assumed this kneeling attitude when a second group appeared, which followed the example set by the others; and then, group after group came into view until the procession seemed never-ending, and the throng of kneeling devotees crowded the room in circle after circle of blood-red devils; and they formed in solid circles save only that a narrow aisle was left which extended from the platform to the shield which has already been described.

There were hundreds of them. Chick had long ceased to count; and in moving about to give them room as they entered, he had been jostled and crowded many times, but always he was pressed in the one

direction, which eventually led to the space beneath the shield—and there they left him unmolested.

There was not a sound in the room during all this time. Not a word was uttered, and, save for the pushing and thrusting which Chick was subjected to, not one of the devils appeared to be aware of his presence.

Hundreds of them there were—many hundreds, and never a word or a sound from one of them. Their cloth-clad feet gave forth no response to the touch of them against the floor, and their faces, dyed the same color as their costumes, made them all look alike, so that it seemed to Chick that, had there been a friend among them, it would have been impossible to identify him.

And yet, there was one significant incident, which happened almost at the last moment, before the last arrival through the hollow platform, and while the assistant was standing at his place beneath the shield.

He felt himself jostled once again, and as he sought to move, a hand seized his for an instant, detaining him, and in that instant he received a delicate pressure.

"Ten-Ichi," he thought to himself; but he made no sign, merely noticing that the one who had pressed his hand, knelt on the floor quite near to him.

And then the platform rose to its place for the last time while the devotees bowed their heads in awe—all save Chick, who was still standing, and who gazed in astonishment upon the scene before him.

Instead of that blood-red hue which marked every other occupant of the room, the figure which now appeared in the center of the platform, and standing erect on the stool before alluded to, was arrayed in unspotted white, with so much of the face as showed, also of chalky whiteness—and the figure was of a woman.

"Dazaar! Irma Blavatski!" breathed Chick in silence, to himself. "Heavens! Isn't she beautiful!"

She stood upon the stool like a statue in marble. In her right hand she grasped a trident with the base of it resting against one of her feet on the stool. Her left hand was raised to a horizontal position, and the index finger was pointing straight at Chick.

Still, not a word was spoken; but, as if the horde of devils who were present were already instructed in what they were to do, they arose as with one impulse to their feet, and to a man turned so that their faces were toward Chick; and then each one raised his left hand in imitation of Dazaar, and pointed the index finger toward Chick.

He shuddered in spite of himself, for this pointing of hundreds of fingers at him by so many painted devils, and the strange and unbroken silence which accompanied it, was uncanny and also disconcerting.

"What next?" he thought. "I suppose they have arranged some horrible ordeal through which I must pass before I can be an accepted member of this crew; but whatever it is—whatever I am asked to do, I must acquiesce. B-r-r! I wish it were over. I'd rather fight the whole crew single-handed than to stand here in this manner and await their will when I haven't the least idea what it is to be, and when I know that, no matter what it is, I must consent to their wishes."

But there was no such ordeal as Chick anticipated awaiting him.

The ceremony of initiation into the order of Devil Worshipers was not to be consummated in a moment. There were other trials to which he was to be subjected before he could be taken into their hellish fold as one of them.

Even Ten-Ichi—as he afterward admitted—was not prepared for what was actually to occur, or he would have warned the detective about it.

Suddenly the silence was broken.

The white figure on the platform dropped her left hand to her side, which motion was immediately imitated by the others, and in a rich voice, which penetrated to the farthest corner of the vast apartment, said:

"Nicholas Carter, have you come here with a direct purpose, and do you now, in the presence of the subjects of Satan, and in my presence, who by the grace of his satanic majesty, and the representative of hell—do you now forswear all that is past, and assume the responsibility of all that is to come?"

Chick bowed his head in an affirmative; but Dazaar was not to be satisfied with such a reply.

"Answer," she commanded.

"I do," said Chick.

"There was a compact between you and me before you traced the shape of a heart upon the pavement of the city—a compact to which the tracing of that heart was intended to be your signature," she continued. "Is that true?"

"It is," assented Chick.

"Did you trace that heart with your own hand?"

"I did," replied Chick, truthfully.

"And you are prepared to carry out the conditions of that contract?"

"I am."

"Step forward, then, to this platform, for you may not be taken into the order, and have revealed to you its secrets, until you are espoused to me according to the rites of our society. Come here."

Chick strode through the aisle until he stood close to the platform. Then Dazaar—or Irma, as you please—stepped down from the stool, and, extending her hand, seized his and assisted him to mount beside her; and as she pulled him toward her, he felt her wonderful eyes burning into his own so that his head swam and his senses seemed to reel almost into unconsciousness.

"Kneel!" she commanded, and he obeyed; and when she had taken a place beside him, upon her knees, she added:

"Repeat, as I shall do, the words which our supreme high priest will utter."

Then, from among the throng that was gathered around them, an individual stepped forward, and with both hands raised over his head, and in a resonant monotone, he sang these words, which Irma and Chick repeated in unison after him:

"I, at this moment forsake all that is past, forgetting those friends and associates who are living, as if they were dead, and cleaving only unto the present moment, and to the time that is to come after this moment, and blending my soul and my body with the soul and the body of my companion here at my side. I have no human ties, no friends, no memories after this moment, save those which are created by this act, and which will exist in this dual life I am about to live and lead. I abjure God and acknowledge the Devil as my master and kind, and I give myself, my soul, my body and my life to Satan, through this companion to whom I will cleave, according to the compact made between us. For from this moment we are husband and wife, and servants of Satan. So be it."

There was an instant of silence, and then the chant was taken up again:

"And we both promise for this man here, that he may at the end of one year, divorce himself from this obligation provided that offspring shall have been born to the woman within that time. And provided that within the next fortnight, he shall have taken upon himself the full vows and obligations of the disciples of Satan. So be it."

Then Chick heard the tread of stealthy feet behind him, and before he could turn to discover what that might portend, a heavy blanket was thrown over their heads, enveloping Irma with him in its folds.

And as the blanket fell upon them, he felt her arms encircle his neck, and her hot lips were thrust into sudden and rapturous contact with his own.

At the same instant he felt the platform sink beneath them, and he knew that he was being carried downward into darkness—he knew not what.

But Irma's lips were smothering him; her kisses were falling like rain upon him; he felt his senses reel, as with suffocation—and then the platform seemed to strike the bottom of the pit with a sudden jolt.

Chick at last felt himself alone in some cellar-like place. Dazaar had gone upward with the platform.

CHAPTER XI.

CONCLUSION.

At the moment when Chick entered the great room alone, as described in the last chapter, he was not unobserved, although he believed himself to be alone. The fact was that, as he stepped forward when the door closed behind him, a face was peering down upon him from above, and if he had but looked up and could have seen that face through the narrow opening to which it was pressed, he would instantly have recognized Nick Carter.

Nick, it must be remembered had been an inmate of that house all that day, for he had arrived early in the morning.

Nor had he been idle since that time.

Once past the numerous guards which surrounded the place and within the portals of the house itself, he discovered that he could make his investigations almost without fear of molestation or discovery.

But search the house as he might, he could find no trace of the prisoners he sought, until it occurred to him that, in such a place as that the most likely place of concealment for them would be immediately under the roof.

However, there seemed to be no stairs which led in

that direction, and he had about concluded that there were none, when he chanced to light upon the method of the inmates for arriving at the top, or attic floor, by means of a slanting ladder that had been built between the outer and the inner wall of the frame of the house; and once he had mounted to that attic floor, his principle difficulties were over.

That floor was divided into numerous small, windowless rooms, each as dark as Erebus; but Nick's pocket lantern obviated that difficulty quickly.

Almost the first room he entered contained Patsy, shackled hand and foot, and chained to the studding of the house; and then, having liberated him, he called, softly:

"Cora! Cora!"

"Here," came the quick reply; and in the room adjoining that occupied by Patsy, he found her.

She had not been injured in any way, and it was the work of a moment to liberate her; and in a very short time the nurse and the four servants were also set at liberty.

It was yet early and there was plenty of time to take them out of the place before the opening of the ceremonies that were to come, and so with stealthy tread he led the way down the slanting ladder and on through the house to the cellar, and so into the hole where the drain pipe had once been located.

Evening had just fallen when this was accomplished, and directing Patsy to wait where he was for an hour, and at the end of that time to conduct them down the ravine, and so out upon the road and on to the house of Hiram Tompkins, he returned to the scene of the ceremonies of the Devil Worshipers.

At the parting with Cora, she had crept closely to him, and, without question, thrust her arms around his neck.

"Neither of us will ever be safe for a moment as long as that terrible woman lives," she whispered; "but is it wise for you to return——"

"Go with Patsy," he said, drawing away from her. "Fear nothing. He will take you home, and in the morning I will call and tell you all about it."

And so they parted.

* * * * * * *

Thus it was that at the moment when Chick entered the great room, Nick was looking down upon him. He had discovered that the attic floor had been cut through in many places—that there were numerous trapdoors all over it, and that in the very center was located a huge one which opened downward, and from its center, by means of double doors, which could be let fall; and these doors were precisely what Nick wanted, for the reader will remember that he had prepared himself thoroughly for this enterprise.

The proceeding already described he watched with interest, and we may know how keenly alive he was to everything that happened there, when we know that he even saw that pressure of the hand which Ten-Ichi gave Chick as he passed him, and he was, therefore, able to recognize the young Jap, and so, through him, his score of followers.

He watched the proceeding closely, not yet determined upon the best moment for the interruption he intended; and so it was that he was unprepared for the sudden descent of the platform upon which Chick and Irma were standing side by side. He saw the blanket as it was thrown over their heads, and he saw the platform disappear—and he was on the point of censuring himself because he had waited so long, when, to his amazement, it reappeared again as suddenly as it had gone from view.

Nor was it unoccupied.

Chick was no longer there, to be sure, but the white, marble-like figure of the woman, with the trident in her right hand, was standing upon the stool with her left arm extended, exactly in the position in which she had first appeared.

Instantly the multitude of devotees dropped upon their knees and bowed their heads—and what might have happened after that, had they remained uninterrupted, will never be known, for Nick Carter decided that the moment had come to act.

He stepped into a sling which he had arranged with ropes directly over the trapdoor, and then, kicking the bolts loose, he dropped through the opening, halfway to the floor beneath, and hung suspended there.

At the moment of dropping he fired his pistol three times into the air, and as he swung outward over the heads of the throng, he leaned far forward and cast the noose of a lasso with unerring aim directly around the figure in white upon the platform.

As the noose settled, he gave it a fierce jerk upward and caught the rope with a hitch around the sling in which he was seated, so that the figure in white was suspended from the floor and therefore helpless, and at the same instant he called out:

"Down, Ten-Ichi—you and your friends—faces to the floor—for your lives!"

Just over his head, attached to the sling, were arranged a number of tubes, and, as he called out, he seized one of these, pulled back the plunger and shot the contents in a spray-like fog upon the mass of upturned faces below him; and when that was emptied, he seized a second tube and repeated the operation; then a third, and then a fourth—and then—for his own face was swathed and muffled in heavy bandages—he gave the sling an extra swing, and so landed upon the space in front of the shield where Chick had stood, and near where Ten-Ichi now was.

What horrible thing was it that he had squirted among them?

That horde of men, dressed to represent devils, were shrieking, and cursing, and crying out with pain. They were running hither and thither. Some of them had managed to reach the trapdoor through which Chick had been thrust into the room, and this they raised, and then they tumbled over one another in their eagerness to escape from the room. And they coughed, and yelled, and rubbed their eyes, and fought with one another, screaming and shrieking, pitching headlong down the stairs, striking those in front of them, and kicking at those who were behind them in their mad efforts to escape, for the firing of the pistols, the lassoing of the figure in white, the shouts of the detective, and then the horrible liquid that had sprayed upon them, blinding and choking them, had made them think that they were attacked by an armed force greater than their own numbers.

And Nick Carter watched them and laughed.

And Ten-Ichi, seeing the bandages covering the mouth and nostrils of his chief, tore a part of his devil's uniform from his body and covered his own face with it, directing his followers to do the same.

"They are escaping," he shouted through the bandages, as the horde tumbled and fell over one another through the trapdoor.

"Let them go. We have what we came after," replied Nick, pointing toward the swaying figure in white, where it hung suspended by the waist almost in the center of the room. "I brought a hundred tablets of concentrated ammonia, and a few good squirt guns with me. That is what is the matter with the crew. We could not capture them all if we tried, and we could do nothing with them worth while if we did so. Let them go. I want her—that woman. The others may go—until they cross my path again."

And they went, indeed!

Within ten minutes there was not a sign of one of the devils left in the room save here and there the torn remnants of a Mephistophelian costume.

"And Chick! Where is he?" he added, after an instant's pause.

As if in reply to his question, the platform, directly under the dangling figure in white, disappeared from view as he spoke, but as Nick leaped forward toward it, it reappeared again, and a figure in red leaped into the air and started toward the detective.

"Here!" he cried. "Chick is here;" and he plunged forward upon his face at the feet of Nick Carter, panting and breathless, but otherwise, apparently unhurt.

Chick, finding himself alone and learning the mechanism of the platform, knew from the noise above that Nick had opened fire and had come up again. He was apparently unhurt, but later it was discovered that he had received a slight flesh wound.

There was a reunion of friends at Nick Carter's house the following day, when Ten-Ichi was given the welcome he so richly deserved for his return to New York at the opportune moment when it had seemed as if the Devil Worshipers must triumph over the detective.

But no person ever triumphed over Nick Carter for long at a time. Do you know why, my reader? Let me tell it in the words of Cora Tempest, when she congratulated him upon his victory.

"You always win, and you always will win, Nick," she said, "because you think the truth, act the truth, speak the truth, and live the truth. You are the living embodiment of the truth and nothing can beat—the truth."

THE END.

The reader will notice that Chick had received a slight flesh wound. It was apparently inconsiderable, but it led to serious results, for it was the starting point of one of the most trying and terrible experiences the writer has ever past through. The true facts of this experience and the final end of Dazaar have never been made public before, although several theories as to how Dazaar finally ended, have gone the rounds in detective circles. You will find the real explanation of Dazaar's end in next week's issue.

Next week's issue, No. 396, will contain "In the Shadow of Dazaar; or, At the Mercy of Vampires."

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